



Clock Without Hands

Carson McCullers

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Set in Georgia on the eve of court-ordered integration, *Clock Without Hands* contains McCullers's most poignant statement on race, class, and justice. A small-town druggist dying of leukemia calls himself and his community to account in this tale of change and changelessness, of death and the death-in-life that is hate. It is a tale, as McCullers herself wrote, of "response and responsibility--of man toward his own livingness."

Clock Without Hands Details

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From Reader Review Clock Without Hands for online ebook

Steven Godin says

McCullers writes about about small town America with such authenticity and really captures people of a certain time and place that is hard to surpass, this is no exception. Through racial prejudice, family secrets and redemption, the lives of four men bound by histories are interwoven to create a tender, poignant and sometimes humorous read. As the last of her novels it's arguably the best written and this is quite something considering she suffered two severe strokes along with other health problems.

What I find striking is her ability to understand the inner workings of man, right down to the core, and it's such a shame that a talent like this was taken from us too soon. Hat's off to you Carson.

Iona Stewart says

At first, I thought the book was just about a pharmacist, Malone, dying of leukemia. He didn't really understand or accept the diagnosis and kept consulting new doctors only to receive the same verdict.

Though the book is indeed about Malone and his situation, it also has an even deeper theme.

Carson lived in the Southern USA in the first half of the 20th Century and she was very aware of the disparity in the treatment and situation of blacks and whites and the injustice of this.

One of the main characters in the story is an elderly judge, or rather Judge, a former Congressman, who has an exceedingly high regard for himself and excessive sense of his own importance. His wife, Miss Missy, has recently died and his son, Johnny, is also dead: his grandson, Jester, lives with him.

The Judge takes on a black houseboy who acts as his "amanuensis" (he writes letters for the Judge); he is an orphan with remarkable blue eyes and is called Sherman Pew.

Sherman is intent on solving the mystery of his parentage; the Judge is involved in it and reveals that he is responsible for the boy being an orphan.

Jester has special feelings for Sherman, but doesn't dare express them

The Judge believes that civilization was founded on slavery, which offends Sherman's sensibilities.

The main theme of the book thus turns out to be the relationship between blacks and whites, and their inequality. Though the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution had guaranteed the blacks the right to vote, no black Sherman had known or heard tell of had ever voted. "Yes, the American Constitution itself was a fraud."

Finally, the truth is revealed about the Judge, Johnny and Sherman. When Sherman better his situation, matters escalate and a dramatic and tragic incident occurs.

I found the author's prose magnificent, and the portrayal of both the Judge, Sherman, and Malone in his predicament very convincing and realistic. In fact, Carson brilliantly conveys the whole noxious atmosphere

of this Southern town, noxious at least as regards interracial relations.

To my mind, this is one of the author's best works.

Iván Ramírez Osorio says

Una novela maravillosa sobre el cambio generacional, sobre la terquedad y sobre los miedos al cambio. La historia se sitúa en el sur de los Estados Unidos al finalizar la Segunda Guerra Mundial y gira alrededor de cuatro personajes diversos, fascinantes, fastidiosos y hermosos. Una novela sobre el racismo, sobre la ruptura de las estructuras y sobre el peso de las mismas en los pequeños individuos. Maravillosa y Enorme McCullers, ansío poder leer más y más de ella.

Bellísimo.

Linda says

Met de eerste zin van haar laatste roman schiet Carson McCullers meteen raak: 'De dood is altijd hetzelfde, maar iedere mens gaat dood op zijn eigen manier.'

In het stadje Milan in Georgia is apotheker J.T. Malone stervende, en ook het oude Zuiden met zijn normen en waarden. De doodstreutel is pijnlijk voor iedereen in the Deep South, waar de gelijkheid zoals die in de grondwet is vastgelegd, anno 1953 dode letter blijft. McCullers brengt al haar thema's samen: eenzaamheid, onbeantwoorde liefde en vooroordelen, en dat met humor en mededogen.

Het is 1953. In een stadje in Georgia, in het zuiden van de Verenigde Staten, volgen we vier mannen. De negenendertigjarige J.T. Malone, drogist en apotheker, hoort dat hij ongeneeslijk ziek is en probeert in het reine te komen met zijn geweten vanwege zijn 'verspilde leven'. Fox Clane, een oude rechter, verzet zich tegen integratie van de zwarte bevolking en verlangt naar de oude waarden van het Zuiden. Zijn dwarse, idealistische kleinzoon Jester koestert heimelijk gevoelens voor Sherman, een zwarte weesjongen met blauwe ogen. Sherman, die te vondeling is gelegd in de kerk, worstelt met zijn identiteit. Gaandeweg blijkt dat hun levens onlosmakelijk met elkaar zijn verbonden.

Humo

<http://bettinaschrijft.blogspot.com/2...>

Peter says

A novel of despair and wasted lives...albeit with some mild hopes of redemption. Though Carson McCullers writes as well as ever, *Clock Without Hands* is a little loose at the seams compared to some of her earlier work. A small-town pharmacist is given a diagnosis of leukaemia which, not surprisingly, makes him reconsider his life and what remains of it. He discovers that "*he was split between love and hatred – but what he loved and what he hated was unclear.*" Yet despite reading Kierkegaard (as small-town pharmacists do), he is just a little too ordinary (especially by McCullers' standards) to make much of an existentialist anti-

hero - and his central position in the novel is in any case usurped by an elderly southern judge whose blindness to the world around him is close to absolute. The judge reminisces happily about the old south, slavery, and fun times in the Klan and is dismayed and surprised to find that his drinking companion, who happens to be young and black, lacks the same nostalgic enthusiasm. His grandson and the young drinking companion, who make up the central quartet of characters, are oddly portrayed (through their dialogue) as children – so much so that I had to flip back through the novel to check how old they were supposed to be. *Clock Without Hands* therefore strikes me as a bit of a muddle – a novel that was written and rewritten over too long a period and in difficult circumstances. Yet despite that, it's never stereotypical, it's full of good writing, and it's still well worth reading.

Alan says

If not more beautiful than *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, as good and even more brave. Gay miscegenation in the south, in the 40s? No wonder it took 10 years to be published. I'm surprised there wasn't more controversy.

Doug says

Still mulling. Review to follow.

Cecily says

Published in 1961, this story is set in a small town in southern USA. The overt story concerns race, justice and to some extent mortality, though there are plenty of other threads. However, it's the examination of the protagonists' views on race that are most interesting and, to some extent troubling, especially to the modern reader as the N word and variants are used quite often, albeit as a noun/statement, rather than necessarily as an insult.

It plays with one's sympathies very effectively. For instance, the old judge is a very traditional white southern patriarch. He is keen to retain segregation, yet strives to be generous to the black people who work for him. Is he bad, a product of his time, or both?

As with all her writing, this is distinctively McCullers, with a lovely, lyrical feel (she was a trained musician).

I expect there are some that would like such a book to be buried and forgotten, but I think the fact that it would be hard to write it now is all the more reason to keep and read it. McCullers' is clearly on the side of equality for the African-American community, but she makes it plain that it is not a straightforward issue of right and wrong or good and bad - and that message is at least as relevant now as it was when segregation was the norm.

Kyle says

Carson McCullers never fails to impress me. In this grim novel of the Southern Gothic tradition, she examines the growing race tensions at the cusp of the civil rights movement, inter-generational gaps and relations, and most importantly the theme of life vs. death. Sheer genius from the first line: "Death is always the same, but each man dies in his own way."

Another aspect of McCullers' writing that I admire is her flawless shifting of points of view between characters. Despite how flawed the characters may be, you cannot help but sympathize with their motives and views through the lenses of their own logic. Besides this, the prose and imagery are incredibly vivid.

I wholeheartedly recommend this one!

Deborah Sheldon says

This mild and lyrically-written story broaches some hardcore topics including identity, racism, homophobia, and death in all its ugly guises. Masterful stuff. Carson McCullers lulls you into thinking you're reading a gentle tale, while repeatedly hitting you over the head. And, believe it or not, you don't see the blows coming.

Kusaimamekirai says

After putting down Carson McCullers's "Clock Without Hands", I gave a lot of thought as to what it was she wanted to say here. Set in small town Georgia in the mid 1950's, The novel opens with a wholly unremarkable pharmacist who discovers he is dying of leukemia. It is in many ways the preamble for a book about death. Physical death and its specter abound to be sure but metaphoric death as well. With integration beginning to take hold and Black men and women beginning to assert their claims for greater equality, it is the death of the old South that is felt the greatest by many of the White characters. In particular that of the elderly judge who freely admits to having a different legal standard for White men and "Nigras", and who is appalled that his son, a lawyer, would defend a Black man accused of rape and murder. The judge, like many of his generation, is determined to do whatever can be done to return the South to its perceived old glory, with predictably tragic consequences.

This was a powerful book in many ways and contained some truly majestic passages. It was also at times slightly rambling, not really sure whose story it wanted to follow, ultimately leaving me slightly unsatisfied that these characters couldn't have been fleshed out a little more. That being said, this is still an important and extremely well written book. Highly recommended.

Diane Barnes says

I believe I have rated McCullers' first 3 novels with 5 stars, but, unfortunately I can't get there with this one. It seemed disjointed and unrealistic, and I disliked each of the four main characters equally. They seemed more like caricatures than real people.

THE JUDGE: A gluttonous, bigoted man who lied to himself as to his worth, and at age 85, has come up with a plan for the federal government to make reparations to the South for the financial ruin brought about when slaves were freed.

JESTER: The judge's 17 year old grandson, who was naive and confused about his sexuality.

SHERMAN PEW: An 18 year old negro orphan with a completely unbelievable personality for the place and time, and a liar of some magnitude.

J.T. MALONE: A 40 year old druggist dying of leukemia, who goes to four different doctors trying to find a diagnosis different than death.

The title of this book is appropriate, however, as a clock without hands makes no sense, and neither did this book, for me. It is possible that I have missed something in my reading, but now I know why I never heard of this book before, even though I am a huge fan of McCullers and consider her other books Southern classics. She made some very good observations of racial aspects of the deep South of 1953, but it just never came together for me.

Nathan says

Set in a small, Southern town on the eve of the Court's decision in *Brown v. Board*, *Clock Without Hands* explores the lives of several of the town's residents as they deal with the changing racial climate of the civil rights era. A story of fear, intolerance, and violence, the novel features a rich and interesting cast of characters that quickly draws you in and a terrible building tension that keeps the pages turning. One of my favorite characters that I've read in a long time is Judge Clane, a "great Southern statesman" who feverishly collects Confederate dollars in the blind hope that the currency will one day become valuable again. I found it really interesting how the story dealt with the law in the town through the character of the Judge, portraying it as sort of a guiltless, inflexible mechanism for resisting change.

My favorite thing about the novel was the depth and richness of its characters. McCullers writes with an unsparing tenderness, laying bare characters who are either unable or unwilling to see their own personal failures. Faced with the possibility of change and equality, the characters instead take confidence in a false sense of tradition and heritage. When their own memories of the past prove to be too imperfect to give them shelter, they simply adopt a more reassuring history of events and believe in that instead.

This probably seems strange, but the novel actually reminded me a lot of Hamlet in a way. More than anything I think it's because the federal government almost seemed like a separate character in the novel in a way that reminded me a lot of Fortinbras' army (it's been a while so I could be wrong, I even had to double check if that was the right name). Even though it's never physically present, the federal government--with its distant promise of equality and civil rights--becomes increasingly present in the characters' lives in a way that reminded me a lot of Fortinbras' army, sort of an ominous external force that's always bearing down closer, invincible and inevitable.

After I finished the novel, which ultimately offers a promising, hopeful call for equality, I felt restless and I couldn't really figure out what to do with myself for a while. I didn't feel like going out for a walk, had already drunk way too much coffee, and definitely wasn't ready to pick up another book. So I ended up going back and reading the Court's opinion in *Brown v. Board* again, and that turned out to be the perfect

complement to this beautiful novel.

4.5/5

Camie says

Small Southern town, 1950's, short story of 4 men: The old judge clinging to the past, his orphaned and confused grandson Jester, a flamboyant black servant Sherman, and the town pharmacist Malone who just found out his diagnosis of fatal leukemia has left him "a clock with no hands" or in other words a man who's counting down to the certain but unknown time of his death. Not my favorite Mc Cullers but worthwhile reading that takes on a lot of tough subjects, especially for that period, racial injustice, sexuality, and last and not least mortality ...
Time stops for no man. 3.5 stars

Lawyer says

Clock Without Hands: Carson McCullers' Southern Requiem

Clock Without Hands by Carson McCullers was chosen by members of On the Southern Literary Trail for November, 2017.

McCullers' final novel was published in 1961. It had been long anticipated. However, reviews were more kind than favorable. The praise lauded on the Wunderkind author of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in 1942 did not appear.

But for the admirer of the works of McCullers, *Clock Without Hands* remains a vital read exploring a fierce and violent South. A South that is unforgiving and unrepentant. The novel is set during the tumultuous days of the Civil Rights Movement. The events are told through the eyes of four central characters.

What does it mean to live when our clock has no hands?

More to follow...

Paul Bryant says

I'm sorry to report that this novel is pretty much a complete disaster. It's a study of four characters located in Milan, Georgia, at the point in the early 1950s when the civil rights movement was beginning to make itself felt in the American South. We have JT Malone, a pharmacist; Judge Clane, an 85 year old ex-congressman; Jester Clane, his 17 year old orphaned grandson; and Sherman Pew, an 18 year old black guy with blue eyes. The whole thing is painful. I'm sure there is a great novel out there with the black struggle in the South as its setting, which I have yet to come across. *Clock Without Hands* is almost a What Not To Do guide for prospective authors.

Maybe it's because I'm English and not from that period, but so many incidents and conversations grated.

Either they were artificial, or just frankly incredible. The Judge is a racist old windbag, a glutton and a vulgar sentimentalist. A great wedge of this novel is him whinging and whining and pontificating and boring (always boring) on and on about whatever he feels like for a page or so, yakking one of the other three into the ground about plans to revive Confederate money or why his wife was the best of all wives or collard greens or why races should not be educated together – that kind of stuff. Another wedge is our author describing the Judge in all his smug horribleness. So this is just tedious and mildly distressing for the reader but nothing too tough. But then we get to Sherman Pew. He's a black youth with BLUE EYES – this is mentioned about three times per page – and he comes across like an early version of the butler in *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Was there ever such a hoity-toity young black guy from the South in the 1950s as Sherman Pew? I quote:

“The end tables are genuine antique as you can see.”

“I’m just telling you I hear every teeniest vibration in the whole diatonic scale from here.”

“I vibrate with every injustice that is done to my race.”

I would suggest that at the very least this character is *unlikely* and most of the time I was thinking he was *frankly bloody ridiculous*. The racist old Judge takes a great liking to Sherman and hires him as an “amanuensis” and sets him to reading Great Poetry and pouring gin and tonics and lunching on caviar. The judge loves him and they have these insane conversations, a lot of which read like maybe Carson thought she was being funny. The pompous old fart and the pompous young fart, how droll. And the old one is a racist but still loves the young one who's black. Tres amusante. Or not. So I couldn't believe in Sherman Pew for one tiny second, which kind of blew a hole in all the criss-crossing motivations and back-story and what-all. I couldn't believe the old Judge would talk to him as if he was an educated equal, and I couldn't believe the grandson Jester would do likewise and freely associate with him without apparently incurring any social consequences. It was like a make-believe world with jaggy bits of occasional race-hate violent reality thrown randomly around to confuse me.

As for the 4th character, JT Malone – he's diagnosed with terminal leukemia on page two and spends the novel mooching around in a pit of black gloom, as well he might. He seems to belong to a completely different story. I suspect CM had bits of stories hanging about which she didn't want to throw away and so stirred them into her novels in the hope they'd make a kind of sense.

Not much of a review, really, which in this case is only appropriate.

Marcos says

I truly think after reading this, its confirmation that she's definitely one of the greatest prose writers I've ever read. This work is slightly more abrupt, terse, and tense than the gentler "The Member of the Wedding" and "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter". The interesting thing about this novel are that the main characters: A dying pharmacist, an aging judge, his grandson, and a racially mixed companion are all male. Usually, Ms. McCullers puts a female character that balances out all the masculinity of the towns in which her novels are set. But this novel, set on the evening of Brown Vs Board of Education, is one of those haunting and abrupt books that will linger on after you finish it; and perhaps her most dark and violent work as well.

Franky says

I see the "clock without hands" metaphor raging through, and see various characters and situations in allegorical terms and the symbolism present, but, to me, the whole novel just wasn't as solid as some of her other works. I thought it was a bit too overdone in many ways (the Judge stands out as an example). It seems at various points that McCullers is trying to underscore a particular theme of human struggle, but the methods by which she attempts to do this don't work as well as many of her other works. At points, it almost seems like she is trying to hard to push the race, death, isolation and time elements and themes into our face.

I really enjoyed McCullers' short stories immensely, especially ones in *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, much better than this one. "Wunderkind" was quite a story, probably my favorite of the bunch, and to anyone who is reading McCullers for the first time, I would suggest this story or some of her other shorter works. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is also a very solid work from this author, and thought it handled the theme of isolation/death a bit better than she does in *Clock Without Hands*.

That being said, I see how McCullers tries to tie everything together in some ways in symbolic form at the end. It's much of the way characters and situations are presented that are ineffective.

McCullers has a strong sense of understanding and empathizing with the human condition, which she presents quite often in her writing, and this is also evident in *Clock Without Hands*. There is something that is very personal in much of her characters, who often struggle against some element of life. It just didn't work as well here in her final novel, in my opinion.

Elliott says

A thoughtful meditation on dying written as the author, Carson McCullers, was dying. Ravaged by strokes and illness, she starts off this novel with the character J.T. Malone, the pharmacist, finding out he will probably die within the year. From this spring board, McCullers weaves a tale that once again explores the themes of loneliness, isolation, and the search for identity and love. Even the opening line of this book ("Death is always the same, but each man dies in his own way") presents the reality of isolation in this world. Yet by the very end of the book, Carson McCullers offers a sense of hope and even that of a fulfilling love.

Ariela says

It's not about liking the characters, it's about being on intimate terms with them.
